

# BiH ESAP 2030+

Bosnia and Herzegovina Environmental  
Strategy and Action Plan 2030+

## Strengthening environmental policy in BiH with a gender equality, social equity and poverty reduction approach

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**Cover image:** Family collecting litter and recycling. Photo: RgStudio / GettyImages

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## Key messages

- Adopting a gender equality, social equity and poverty reduction (GESEP) perspective in environmental policy enables more inclusive and effective policymaking.
  - In Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), certain population subgroups – such as the elderly, the sick, children, pregnant women, and Roma communities – are especially vulnerable to pollution and environmental hazards because of increased sensitivity, a greater likelihood of exposure and reduced resilience.
  - Social norms influence access to and control over natural resources. In BiH, where local customs and traditions often privilege male land ownership, men own approximately 70% of land and 97% of private forests.
  - Disadvantaged population groups may have knowledge and expertise that could help address environmental issues. For instance, given their expertise of forest resources, elderly women in rural areas could play a key role regarding the sustainable use of non-wood forest products in BiH.
  - Environmental policy itself can also have a wider impact on certain groups in society; for instance, imposing new vehicle standards or new energy taxes may affect low-income households disproportionately.
  - Reversely, some environmental measures may also improve social equity. For instance, improving energy efficiency in social housing contributes to reduced energy poverty and decreased cost burden of marginalized households.
  - Assessing the distributional impacts of new environmental policies and making opportunities associated with them available to disadvantaged groups is also an essential step towards integrating GESEP considerations into environmental policy.
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### Summary

This policy report explores the interactions between the environment and issues related to gender equality, social equity and poverty (GESEP) in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). It identifies opportunities for the further mainstreaming of GESEP issues into the BiH Environmental Strategy and Action Plan 2030+ (BiH ESAP 2030+) and future environmental policy in the country. It first describes existing multidimensional inequality and poverty in the BiH context. The report then explains how environmental and GESEP challenges are interlinked, drawing upon examples from the BiH context. Lastly, it discusses the key policy implications of the interactions between environmental and GESEP issues in BiH.

# Contents

<b>Key messages</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Summary</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>5</b>
The socio-economic and institutional context	7
<b>Gender equality, social equity, and poverty in BiH</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Multidimensional inequalities	8
Gender and sexuality	9
The Roma minority	10
Persons with disabilities	10
Age	11
Returnees and migrants	11
Multidimensional poverty	12
<b>The relationships between GESEP and environmental issues in BiH</b> .....	<b>13</b>
Applying a GESEP lens to environmental issues in BiH means first asking the following questions:	13
Distribution of access to and ownership of natural resources	14
Vulnerable groups and environmental challenges	14
Different group interests and their potential to influence how environmental issues are addressed	15
GESEP implications of environmental policy	16
<b>Policy considerations</b> .....	<b>17</b>
Collecting disaggregated data	17
Mainstreaming environmental and GESEP issues across all major government plans	17
Tools to mainstream GESEP considerations	17
Tools to address the distributional impacts of environmental policy	19
<b>References</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>Annexes</b> .....	<b>26</b>
Annex 1: Overview of GESEP related strategic documents in BiH	26
Annex 2: International Conventions related to GESEP ratified by BiH	28
Annex 3: Overview of GESEP-related laws in BiH	31

# Introduction

Gender inequality and social inequity – understood in terms of access to and control over assets, participation in decision-making and knowledge, which are all dimensions of poverty<sup>1</sup> – are both drivers and outcomes of environmental change (SEI, 2019). Socio-economic factors affect people's exposure and vulnerability to environmental risks, with socially disadvantaged population groups being disproportionately at risk from the negative impacts (European Environment Agency, 2018; WHO, 2019). At the same time, solutions to environmental change are not socially neutral. For example, lower income households may be relatively more affected financially by the introduction of environmental policies, such as environmentally motivated taxes or energy efficiency standards, than wealthier households.

The existence of these interactions between environmental problems and policies, and issues of gender inequality, social inequity and poverty is becoming increasingly recognized by international organizations (UNCCD, 2017; UNEP, 2017; UNEP & UNDP, 2016). However, the way in which these interactions play out in practice is very much context dependent. The World Health Organization (WHO), for instance, highlights that while health inequalities associated with the environment exist throughout the WHO European Region, disparities in exposure to environmental risks occur both between and within countries (WHO, 2019).

In this report, we explore the interactions between the environment and issues related to gender equality, social equity and poverty (GESEP), with examples raised from the Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) context.<sup>2</sup> As BiH prepares the BiH Environmental Strategy and Action Plan 2030+ (BiH ESAP 2030+) – which will provide a roadmap for future environmental-sector measures and investments,

<sup>1</sup> In this report we rely on a multidimensional definition of poverty, which goes beyond income poverty and refers to the lack of resources, power, voice, opportunities and choice, and human security (Sida, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> A series of associated discussion briefs describe these interactions in more detail from various thematic perspectives and can be found on the project's website, [esap.ba](http://esap.ba).

and mechanisms for their implementation beyond 2030 – we identify some opportunities for the further mainstreaming of GESEP issues into the BiH ESAP 2030+ and future environmental policy. Without the mainstreaming of GESEP issues, the goals of the BiH ESAP 2030+, future environmental policy and sustainable development risk not being achieved.

In addition, adopting a GESEP perspective in environmental policy is not only a way to work towards “leaving no one behind”, a key principle of the 2030 Development Agenda, but also a practical strategy to better understand “the reality on the ground and people's relation to the environment, and thus open up more effective solutions to the problem” (UNEP 2017, p. 4). There are also institutional and legal reasons to account for GESEP considerations in environmental policymaking in BiH. BiH is part of a series of multilateral agreements designed to protect human rights and prevent discrimination, particularly with regards to women, children, people with disabilities and minorities. Several environmental conventions which BiH is a part of include obligations linked to gender equality, social equity and poverty reduction, such as the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm conventions on the protection of human health and the environment from hazardous chemicals and wastes and the Convention on Biological Diversity.<sup>3</sup>

In BiH<sup>4</sup> there are also legal requirements and strategic policy documents that promote the mainstreaming of GESEP concerns across the policy landscape, such as the BiH Gender Action Plan

<sup>3</sup> Some environmental strategic documents in BiH explicitly refer to GESEP-related commitments and requirements deriving from international agreements. For example, the National Implementation Plan for the Stockholm Convention (GEF & UNIDO, 2015) in BiH refers to the United Nations Industrial Development Organization Guidelines for including issues of equality and gender mainstreaming in national implementation plans regarding persistent organic pollutants (UNEP, 2012). The Strategy and Action Plan for Protection of Biodiversity in BiH refers to Aichi Target 16 on the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the utilization of genetic resources (UNEP, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> BiH consists of two entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which itself is composed by 10 cantons, and Republika Srpska. The BiH Constitution also established the Brčko District, which falls under the responsibility of the institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina and whose territory is jointly owned by the two entities.



Woman and child wear masks to protect against air pollution. Photo: Phynart Studio, Gettyimages

2018-2022 (Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2018) and the BiH Disability Policy (Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of BiH, 2008) (see Annex 1 and 3). The Law on Gender Equality, for example, requires gender impact assessments of policy and legislative processes (Law on Gender Equality in Bosnia and Herzegovina [Official Gazette of BiH, No. 32/10], 2010). Various GESEP policy documents highlight the interlinkages with the environment, such as the BiH Gender Action Plan (GAP) (Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2018),<sup>5</sup> the RS Strategy for Improving the Situation of Women in Rural Areas,<sup>6</sup> and the BiH Strategy for addressing the issues of Roma (Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of BiH, 2005).<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The GAP mentions that children, elderly persons, women and disable persons are especially vulnerable when natural disasters occur (Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2018).

<sup>6</sup> The Strategy mentions the development of agriculture, environmental development and the preservation of natural resources among its key priorities.

<sup>7</sup> The BiH Strategy for addressing Roma issues highlights economic opportunities from sectors, such as collecting and processing of secondary raw materials, cleaning of public property, other activities in the preservation of nature and the environment, and small-scale agriculture to provide employment and business opportunities to Roma people (Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of BiH, 2005).

This report is based on a review of primary and secondary sources, including international organizations' databases, academic papers and grey literature on environment, equity and poverty issues. The analysis is limited by important constraints, such as the lack of recent data on the state of the environment and environmental health impacts in BiH, and the fragmentation of relevant information across multiple sources. Therefore, it does not pretend to be exhaustive. Rather, it aims to highlight some of the main ways in which environmental issues and gender equality, social equity and poverty are linked – both in general and in the BiH context. Available information does not allow for a differentiated analysis at entity/district level.

The remainder of this report is structured as follows. In Section 2, we summarize some of the main GESEP challenges in BiH. Section 3 explains the different ways in which environmental and GESEP challenges are interlinked and illustrates these links with examples from the BiH context. Lastly, Section 4 discusses some key policy considerations related to the interactions between environmental and GESEP issues in BiH.



# Gender equality, social equity, and poverty in BiH

This section describes some of the key GESEP challenges in BiH. It does not aim to be exhaustive; rather, it briefly outlines which population groups are affected by:

1. the lack of gender equality – a situation in which women and girls do not have equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities compared with men and boys (Sida, 2016)
2. poor social equity – which implies not only unequal opportunities between, but also unfair outcomes for, men and women and people of different classes, ethnicities, nationalities, etc. (Davis et al., 2016) and/or
3. multidimensional poverty – i.e., the lack of resources, power, a voice, opportunities and choice, and human security (Sida, 2019)

This is important for environmental policymaking because socially disadvantaged population groups may be more vulnerable to environmental risks or may be able to help address environmental issues based on their specific knowledge and experiences.

## The socio-economic and institutional context

BiH is at an early stage of establishing a functioning market economy and experiences many of the problems associated with this process. It suffers from weaknesses in its business environment, the rule of law, supervisory and regulatory institutions, brain drain<sup>8</sup> and high unemployment levels (European Commission, 2020). It has both relatively high poverty levels and high (and increasing) income inequality compared with the European Union average (Obradović et al., 2019). In 2010, more than half of BiH's population was at risk of poverty or social exclusion, with few signs of much improvement shown since then (UNICEF, 2020). The Covid-19-induced economic crisis resulted in a fast drop in economic activity and a clear deterioration of

<sup>8</sup> The term "brain drain" refers to a higher emigration rate of highly educated individuals relative to the remaining population.

the labour market (European Commission, 2020). It also highlighted and worsened pre-existing inequalities, such as unequal distribution of care and domestic work between men and women, and unequal access to health and education services (UNICEF and UNDP, 2021).

BiH has ratified all major European and international human rights conventions (see Annex 2). However, despite the fact that the legislation and institutions in the field of non-discrimination, gender equality, respect for and protection of minorities' rights, and social policy are largely in place (see Annex 3), they are not effectively enforced (European Commission, 2019b). Strong discrimination and deeply rooted negative stereotypes remain against Roma people, and other individuals and groups who are minorities in their communities, including returnees, religious minorities and migrants. There is also discrimination on the basis of one's sexual orientation or identity (OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2020).

The complex political and institutional structure of BiH may contribute to discrimination towards citizens, which leads to higher inequalities and increases feelings of social injustice. As part of the process of becoming an EU member, BiH is still at an early stage of fulfilling the membership criteria concerning the stability of institutions that guarantee the rule of law, human rights and protection of minorities.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the complex process of decision-making and institutional settings hinders the process of creating comprehensive development strategies for the whole country.

The BiH Law on Gender Equality, which was first adopted in 2003 and then actualised in 2009 and 2010, became the most important instrument for developing awareness of gender equality issues and it introduced the principle of gender equality into public policies and regulations. The Law, which

<sup>9</sup> The latest Commission Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application for membership of the European Union stresses that the country still needs to implement 128 accepted recommendations from the 2014 UN Universal Periodic Review (regarding recognizing equality of all citizens, preventing discrimination against minorities and gender-based violence) (European Commission, 2019b).

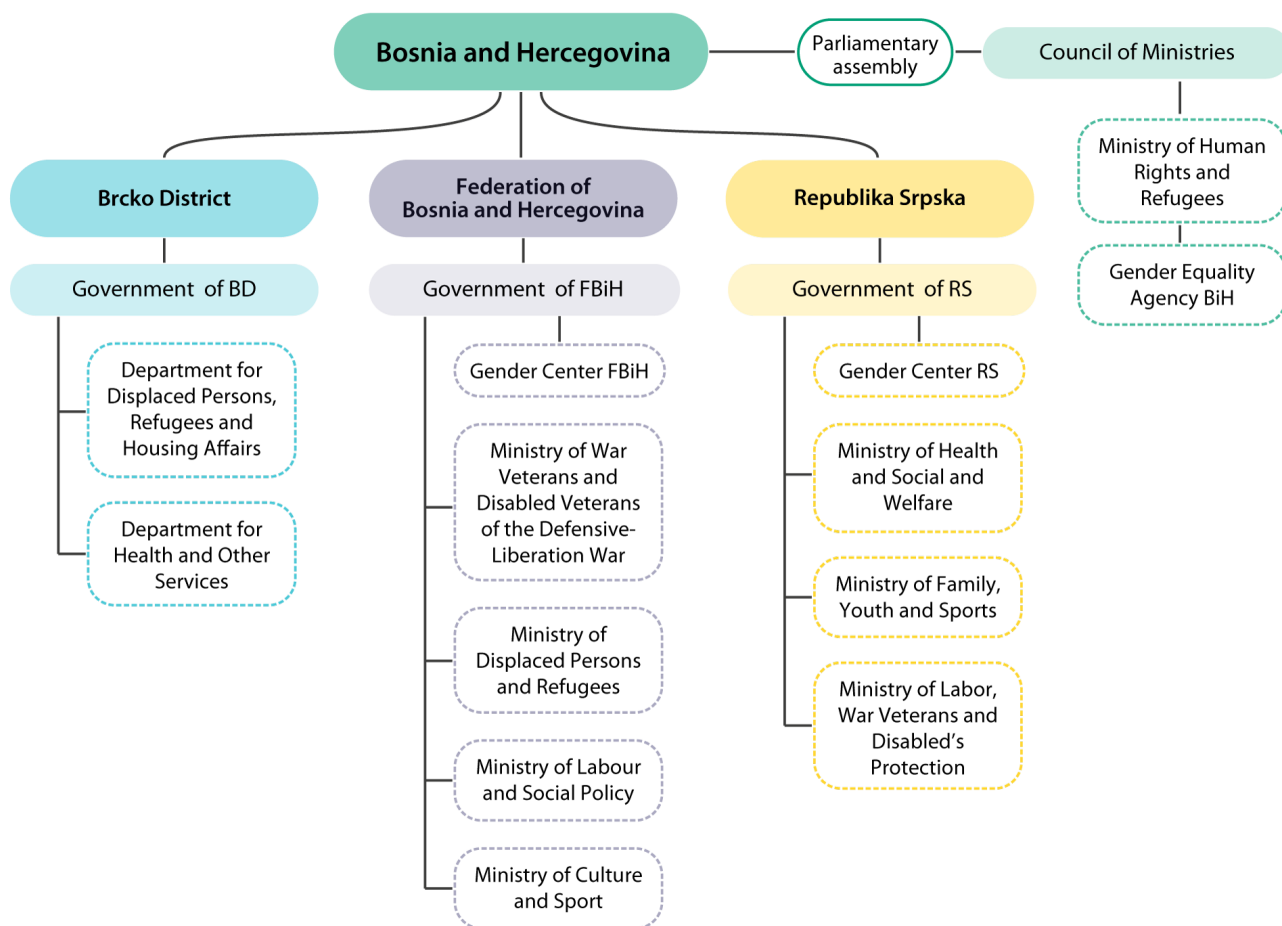


Figure 1: Schematic overview of all institutions in the GESEP field in BiH

was the first of this type to be adopted in southeast Europe, regulates, promotes and protects gender equality. It was the implementation of international conventions and cooperation instruments – such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the Security Council Resolution 1325 “Women, Peace and Security”, and the recommendations of the United Nations Millennium Summit – that drove the development of legislation and institutions dedicated to addressing gender inequalities in BiH. For instance, the Constitutions of BiH, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and Republika Srpska (RS) all include the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of gender, with the FBiH Constitution even including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women as an integral part of the Constitution’s text (Aganović et al., 2015; Bakšić Muftić & Grubešić, 2012).

BiH also has a Gender Equality Agency (within the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees in BiH), established in 2004, and two Gender Centers at entity level, which have existed since 2000 in FBiH and 2001 in RS (see figure 1 above displaying the

GESEP institutional framework in BiH). Together, they are responsible for designing and implementing gender mainstreaming activities. For instance, the current Gender Action Plan for BiH (Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2018) seeks, among other goals, to achieve equal gender representation in decision and policymaking at all levels of authority in BiH, to eliminate “sex-based discrimination in work, employment and the labour market, and ensuring equal opportunities for women and men in accessing economic resources, including reduction of poverty through the new macroeconomic and development strategies” (p. 28), and to “improve the health condition of women and men through simple and effective access to information and healthcare institutions” (p. 35).

## Multidimensional inequalities

The BiH Strategic Framework (Directorate for Economic Planning, 2015) identifies the following disadvantaged groups: children, women, youth, the elderly, persons with disabilities, Roma people, refugees and displaced persons. It is important to recognize that men, women, persons with disabilities, the poor, the elderly, children and Roma people



do not have one-dimensional identities. They have multiple, fluid identities that intersect with each other. For example, a woman may be elderly or young, poor or affluent, Roma or non-Roma. Various differences (such as in sex, ethnicity, place of residency, age, etc.) in combination with formal rules (e.g., laws and regulations) and informal norms (e.g., traditions and values) deeply shape people's vulnerability and resilience to environmental challenges in BiH. Therefore, to avoid generalizations, one needs to account for these multiple, intersecting identities.

Unfortunately, available information on the interactions between gender equality, social equity and poverty and environmental challenges in BiH does not allow for such a detailed assessment. The analysis compiled in this report, then, uses some generalizations, which further studies could help nuance.

## Gender and sexuality

Gender inequality and social inequity in BiH are present in many areas where formal and informal rules and norms construct power hierarchies, which both enables and limits opportunities for different population groups. Conservative and patriarchal values dominate society in BiH, with most men and women expressing traditional perceptions of gender roles in survey research (World Bank et al., 2015). Despite improvements being made in access to education and participation in the labour force over the past decade, there are still gender gaps in both economic and political participation (Abaz & Hadžić, 2020; Kadribašić & et al., 2020).

Many women also lack the same economic opportunities as men. BiH ranks below the world's average in terms of access to productive and financial resources (OECD, 2020). BiH is ranked 115th in the Global Gender Gap Index 2021 with regards to "Economic Participation and Opportunity" (World Economic Forum, 2021). Traditional patriarchal social norms limit their employment trajectories in the labour market (in terms of entry, wage, upward mobility and type of employment), their entrepreneurial prospects and their access to higher decision-making positions (OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2020; World Bank et al., 2015). For instance, over 40% of women have lower income than their male partner, while only 13% of the women in a heterosexual relationship have a higher income than their partner in BiH (Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2020). The cost of these gender disparities in labour force participation amounts to approximately 16% of the gross national income (Teignier & Cuberes, 2015).

The main drivers behind this problem include patriarchal perceptions of gender roles, the gender-segregated labour market, an unequal division of

family responsibilities and insufficient childcare and elderly care services (Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2018). Moreover, there is a pay gap in both paid and unpaid labour, as in over 90% of heterosexual partnerships in BiH, all or most of the household chores are performed by women (Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2020). Women also spend on average five times more than their male partners on routine housework, with older women and women with a lower level of education spending more time doing household chores and other family responsibilities, including childcare (Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2020).

Conservative and patriarchal values are also reflected in the male dominance in decision-making positions in BiH. The proportion of men in managerial positions is considerably higher than women. In 2019, for example, 82.5% of heads of political institutions were men (Agency for Statistics of BiH, 2020). The participation of women in public life and decision-making, as well as female political representation, remains low, except in the judiciary (Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2018). BiH was ranked 45th in the 2021 Global Gender Gap Index based on "Political Empowerment" (World Economic Forum, 2021). Moreover, gender-based violence is widespread in BiH (OSCE, 2019). Women who are poor, internally displaced, Roma or living in rural areas are especially disadvantaged (Gender Equality Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2018; World Bank et al., 2015).

Same-sex couples continue to be discriminated against; their social and economic rights, including the right to family life, are not legally recognised (European Commission, 2019a). While there was some progress in 2019 in terms of freedom and support for LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex), notably with the adoption of a LGBTI inclusive Gender Action Plan in Sarajevo Canton, significant issues remain. Indeed, there are shortcomings in terms of prosecuting incitement to violence and of violence against LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer) persons, legal regulation of freedom of assembly and hate speech, as well as the legal protection of vulnerable LGBTI migrants and asylum seekers in BiH (Pandurević et al., 2020).

Intersex and transgender persons are particularly marginalized, as trans persons "often report discrimination, incidents or hate crimes based on gender identity, hate speech and verbal attacks, peer and domestic violence" and intersex persons remain invisible to the eyes of the law (Pandurević et al., 2020, p. 48). The Law of Gender Equality does not include any articles regarding intersex or transgender individuals. The Anti-Discrimination Law, adopted in 2009, prohibits discrimination against transgender



Persons with mobile impairment playing sports. Photo: FatCamera, GettyImages

persons, and a series of 2016 amendments to the Law established the prohibition of discrimination based on sexual characteristics, a key step to protecting intersex persons' human rights. Nevertheless, in practice, the rights of transgender and intersex persons in BiH are still not sufficiently protected (Pandurević et al., 2020). For instance, the right to self-determination (in this case with regards to gender or gender identity determination) is either limited or rendered impossible by existing legal solutions and practices (Išić, 2018).

## The Roma minority

The Roma are the most disadvantaged and vulnerable minority in BiH (European Commission, 2019a). The Roma population, and especially Roma women, face social exclusion and discrimination in many areas, including employment, education, housing and access to health services (OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2020). Job opportunities for Roma people are usually found in the informal sector, mainly in the waste management sector (European Commission, 2019a).

Despite recent improvements, a large share of the Roma population in Central and Eastern Europe live in informal settlements, often on the outskirts of smaller towns that are regularly deprived of basic environmental necessities, such as water, adequate sanitation and/or waste collection, and are more prone to environmental hazards (Heidegger & Wiese, 2020). They are also often denied access to information and the right to participate in decision-making on the

environmental matters that significantly impact their lives (Heidegger & Wiese, 2020).

## Persons with disabilities

In 2013, the BiH Census gathered data on disability in BiH.<sup>10</sup> It found that 8% of the population lived with at least one disability, 55% of which were female and 45% were male (Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2018).<sup>11</sup> The Census looked at six types of disabilities, related to seeing (1.48% of the BiH population), hearing (0.61%), walking (2.75%), memory or concentration (0.25%), dressing or maintaining hygiene (0.04%) and communication, i.e., the ability to exchange information or ideas with other persons (0.08%). The percentage of BiH's population with more than one disability was 3.12%. The Census also showed that less than 1% of the population under 15 years had a disability (of which 58% were male and 42% were female). Almost 30% of the population over 65 years old had a disability (of which 35% were male and 65% were female). There was also a slightly higher percentage of the population with at least one disability in non-urban areas (8.8%) compared with urban areas (7.7%).

<sup>10</sup> These numbers need to be read with caution, as they do not correspond with "disability" in the traditional medical sense, but instead reflect a measure of persons with functional limitations (UNICEF, 2017a).

<sup>11</sup> The Census includes disaggregated information by disability status, sex, age, municipality and type of settlement. The Census also collected information about the origins of disability, but this information has not been made available yet.

Persons with disabilities are often excluded economically and socially in Bosnian society, particularly those from rural areas or women with disabilities (European Commission, 2019a). Persons with disabilities face discrimination in accessing education, employment, social protection and health care (OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2020). Public support for this group is very limited and varies depending on the origin of the disability, with persons with war-related disabilities enjoying priority over other persons with disabilities (The Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2019). Due to poor infrastructure or outdated planning, persons with disabilities still struggle with physical barriers to accessing public buildings (European Commission, 2019a).

## Age

Age can also play a role in social inequities. For example, in BiH children face higher consumption poverty rates<sup>12</sup> than adults. In 2011, 30.6% of BiH's youth population were found to experience consumption poverty compared to 23.4% of the total population. Furthermore, considerable disparities in children's rights remain, especially for children from the Roma community and other vulnerable

children due to sex, disability, age and place of residence (UNICEF, 2020). Data from the 2011 Expanded Household Budget Survey showed that about three quarters of children aged 5 to 15 years were deprived in at least one poverty dimension<sup>13</sup> and over a fifth were deprived in three or more dimensions (Ferrone & Chzhen, 2015). Senior citizens may also be considered vulnerable because of their specific needs and their dependence on the assistance of others, with senior women often in a worse position than male seniors as they tend to have lower pensions (Papić & Fetahagić, 2019).

## Returnees and migrants

Another marginalized group is the returnee population, which has limited access to rights related to the labour market, social benefits and health care (Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, 2018). The 2013 BiH Census, which gathered data on returnees, found that of the approximately 450,000 people that had fled the country during the 1992-1995 war, about 70% had returned to the place from which they had fled, 24% had returned to another place in BiH and less than 2% had remained abroad.<sup>14</sup>



Elderly woman in wheelchair in Sarajevo, BiH. Photo: Jasmin Merdan, Gettyimages

<sup>12</sup> This indicator uses the absolute monthly consumption poverty line figure of 238 BAM per capita established by the Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Ferrone & Chzhen, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> The study covers the following dimensions: Nutrition, Clothing, Educational Resources, Leisure, Social Participation, Information Access and Housing (Ferrone & Chzhen, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> The Census also found that the situation of 3.3% of the refugees that had fled the country during the war was unknown.



Migrants are also at a disadvantage in BiH. Following the closure of the migrant route through Serbia and Hungary in 2016 and 2017, BiH became a transit route for migrants heading towards Western Europe (OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2018). The number of migrants entering BiH increased significantly in 2018 and 2019, with 24,000 and 29,000 reported arrivals, respectively (ACAPS, 2021). In 2020, there were approximately 8,700 asylum seekers and migrants in BiH, a quarter of which did not have formal accommodation (ACAPS, 2021). Almost 20% of the people on the move in BiH are children, of whom more than a third are unaccompanied minors (Stanicek, 2019). Migrants tend to have limited access to appropriate accommodation, health care and education (UNHCR, 2018).

## Multidimensional poverty

Most recent official data indicates that the poverty rate<sup>15</sup> in BiH is 16.9%, with the population in rural areas being worse off (19%) than the urban population (12%) (BiH Household Budget Survey, 2015). Moreover, almost half of the population can be considered to be at risk of experiencing poverty and social exclusion (Ceriani & Ruggeri Laderchi, 2015). The proportion is higher for children, as almost a third of those aged 5 to 15 are at risk of poverty (European Commission, 2019a). The situation is especially difficult for children with disabilities, Roma and other minority children, and children in female headed households (European Commission, 2019a; UNICEF, 2020). Poverty is also relatively more present among the elderly, especially in rural areas (Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2017).

Lack of employment opportunities constitute a key source of deprivation. In 2019, the unemployment rate was 15.7%, rising to 37.9% amongst youth, and the share of informal employment was 23% (ILOSTAT, 2020). Moreover, having a job does not guarantee a way out of poverty. Indeed, in-work poverty in 2015 was estimated at 24.5%, due to low wages, low work intensity and unpaid wages (Obradović et al., 2019). Like in many countries worldwide, women in BiH constitute a majority

<sup>15</sup> The relative poverty line is set to the amount of 60% of the median equalized household consumption expenditure. The OECD-modified equivalence scale is used to calculate equalized household size.

of the non-agricultural informal sector workforce (BiH Household Budget Survey, 2015).

BiH also suffers from shortcomings in the education and health sectors which contributes to multidimensional poverty<sup>16</sup> and undermines its citizens' future. While school enrolment is relatively high, learning outcome levels in BiH are below that of the EU and other countries in the region. There are mismatches in skills between the education system and labour market, and most disadvantaged populations (such as students from minority, poor and rural backgrounds) do not have equal access to the education system (World Bank, 2019a). Similarly, while the health care system in BiH has improved, several issues remain, such as discrimination against minorities and vulnerable populations and corruption (European Commission, 2019a).

The GESEP issues highlighted in this section influence how certain population groups may put pressure on the environment, or, conversely, experience an unfair share of the environmental impacts, such as pollution, climate change and environmental hazards. GESEP-related rules and norms, both formal and informal, also influence the distribution of natural resources and the potential different groups have to adapt to and address environmental issues. These dynamics are further described in the next section.

<sup>16</sup> Multidimensional poverty is not only about the lack of material resources. It also includes four interlinked dimensions: resources, opportunities and choice, power and voice, and human security (Sida, 2017).

# The relationships between GESEP and environmental issues in BiH

## Applying a GESEP lens to environmental issues in BiH means first asking the following questions:

- How does poverty, and the lack of gender equality and social equity contribute to environmental challenges (such as pollution and climate change)?
- How do environmental challenges affect gender equality, social equity and poverty?
- How equal is the distribution of natural resources?
- Which groups in society are most vulnerable or have specific needs in relation to the environment, and why?
- How and to what extent do different groups in society have potential to improve the environment?
- What are the distributional impacts of environmental policy?

In this section, we describe the different ways in which environmental and GESEP challenges are interlinked and illustrate this with examples from the BiH context. The BiH issues described in this section are not exhaustive. More information can be found in the series of thematic factsheets that accompany this report. Moreover, the lack of available information on the case of BiH does not yet allow for a detailed intersectional assessment to be made. We are therefore only able to provide a few examples that account for intersectionality.

Social inequity and poverty can contribute to environmental issues. In BiH, for example, economically disadvantaged households are more likely to use cheap and highly polluting fuels, such as coal and fuel oil, for domestic purposes (UNEP, 2013), which contributes to air pollution. The income-poor are also more likely to drive older, high-emission vehicles, or settle in areas that are unfit for habitation (UN in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2017; World Bank, 2019b). Poverty may also contribute to waste management issues in BiH as it limits the capacity of households to pay the tariff for waste management and so, mainly for political reasons, authorities are disinclined to raise the tariffs (see Ionkova, 2019).

Reversely, pollution and environmental change disproportionately affects socially disadvantaged population groups, which reinforces existing inequalities (Ganzleben & Kazmierczak, 2020; Islam & Winkel, 2015). For instance, the health implications of pollution tend to affect more people from low-income backgrounds because they are more likely to live in polluted areas and experience difficulties accessing adequate health services (European Environment Agency, 2018). This can affect working and learning capacity (UNDP, 2011; Zhang et al., 2018), and thus limit opportunities for improved living conditions through employment and education.

Similarly, the poorest populations tend to be more vulnerable to environmental hazards, such as floods and droughts, because they tend to live in areas at risk of floods, they are likely to depend on agriculture and/or may not be able to afford the home improvements needed to adjust to increasing temperatures (European Environment Agency, 2020; Heidegger & Wiese, 2020; UN Women, forthcoming). This can lead to – and even lock them into – extreme poverty (Heidegger & Wiese, 2020). In the past two decades, the country has been experiencing extreme climate events, such as severe droughts, which have

led to significant losses in agricultural production and forest fires (Popov et al., 2019). The devastating floods of 2014 in BiH – which affected 1.5 million people (nearly 39% of the population) and displaced around 90,000 people (USAID, 2016) – demonstrated that the greatest impact of hazards on livelihoods tends to be in the informal economy where women make up a large part of the workforce (UN Women, forthcoming).

## Distribution of access to and ownership of natural resources

Social norms influence access to and control over natural resources. These norms also contribute to inequality regarding land ownership. For instance, even though the law in BiH stipulates that men and women have equal rights to own assets and that all children, regardless of gender, have equal rights to inherit the land, local gender practices and traditions generally favour male ownership (AGEBiH, 2014; World Bank et al., 2015). Between 2003 and 2013, men consistently owned approximately 70% of land in BiH (World Bank et al., 2015). From 2007 to 2009, only 3% of private forest owners in BiH were women (Avdibegovic et al., 2015). There has been some progress in this area, however, as the growing proportion of women registered as heads of family farms illustrates (from 10% in 2016 to around 18% today) (FAO & UN Women, 2021). This is relevant because secure land rights are essential for women's economic empowerment, food security, income generation, and access to credit, and serve as a means of holding savings for the future (Sida, 2015).

The lack of access to, and ownership of, natural resources is a prevalent problem for other disadvantaged groups. For example, access to safe drinking water is unevenly distributed in BiH, with people living in rural areas being more likely to lack access (UNDP, 2013b). Another example is Roma people, who also have limited land ownership rights. Many Roma people live in informal settlements and lack formally secured real property rights, which makes them vulnerable to forced evictions (Heidegger & Wiese, 2020; OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2014). As a result, they also have less access to safe drinking water and other basic services, including sanitation and waste collection (Heidegger & Wiese, 2020; OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2014). Indeed, while the rate of access to piped water among marginalized Roma communities in BiH is one of the highest in the Western Balkans, it remains lower compared with neighbouring non-Roma households (UNDP, 2018). Low incomes also limit the ability of Roma households to pay for housing-related services and facilities, contributing

to their poor housing conditions (Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees of BiH, 2017a). Limited access to basic services makes it harder for Roma to accumulate human capital (i.e. knowledge, skills and experience) because of the negative impacts on wellbeing, including healthy childhood development and school performance and attendance (Robayo-Abril & Millán, 2019).

## Vulnerable groups and environmental challenges

Certain population subgroups – such as the elderly, the sick, children, pregnant women and socially deprived communities—are especially vulnerable to pollution and environmental hazards because they may be more exposed and have less resources to cope. Their bodies may also react differently to exposure compared to other groups (European Environment Agency, 2020). For instance, women, fetuses, infants and children are especially sensitive to hazardous chemicals partly for physiological reasons (UNDP, 2011). However, differentiated exposure and vulnerability to environmental issues is also very much the result of socio-economic status. For instance, the 2014 destructive floods in BiH showed that the largest impact of disasters on livelihoods tends to be in the informal economy<sup>17</sup> where women make up a large part of the workforce (UN Women, forthcoming).

Factors – including living conditions, occupation and roles performed within the household, and social marginalisation – can all lead to increased risks of exposure to chemical pollution (GEF & UNIDO, 2015; Heidegger & Wiese, 2020). For example, people working on hazardous waste landfills, fire-fighters, construction workers, individuals who repair and replace condensers and transformers and people working in metal processing and building materials are more likely to be exposed to chemicals at their workplace. Due to prevailing gender norms, many of these activities are traditionally undertaken by men. Another example of social marginalization in action is informal waste picking, which is often carried out by Roma people, as many of them do not have access to formal employment opportunities due to low skill levels and labour market exclusion (Robayo-Abril & Millán, 2019). At the same time, gender norms make women more likely to be exposed to chemicals at

17 The informal economy refers to “all economic activities by workers and economic units that are – in law or in practice – not covered or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements”. Enterprises in the informal sector are unincorporated and are “owned by individual household members or several members of the same or different households. Typically, they are operating at a low level of organization, on a small scale and with little or no division between labour and capital as factors of production” (OECD & ILO, 2019, p. 155).



their workplace (for instance, when they work in the health sector) and in their homes, through household cleaning or beauty products (GEF & UNIDO, 2015; UNDP, 2011).

Air pollution is another area where differences in vulnerability and health impacts arise. In BiH, levels of ambient air pollution are often considerably over the World Health Organization, EU and domestic air quality standards, and cause one of the highest average mortality rates<sup>18</sup> by air pollution in the world (European Commission, 2019a). Like elsewhere in Europe, certain social groups are particularly at risk of negative health impacts, such as “people of lower socio-economic status [who] tend to live, work and go to school in places with worse air quality” (European Environment Agency, 2020, p. 63). Roma people and people living in refugee camps also appear to be particularly exposed, as air pollution is often a persistent issue in poor-quality housing and temporary settlements (Nikoloski & Marnie, 2018; World Bank, 2019b). Here, poverty can worsen the negative health impacts of air pollution by limiting access to information and health care resources (World Bank, 2019b). Children and the elderly are also particularly at risk because of physiological factors (Awe et al., 2019; UNEP, 2018; UNICEF, 2020).

The spatial segregation of Roma people contributes to higher exposure to pollution and natural hazards, because they often live and/or work in environmentally degraded and polluted sites or in areas prone to environmental hazards, such as floods (Heidegger & Wiese, 2020). The 2014 episode of severe floods and landslides, for instance, heavily affected internally displaced people (IDPs) living in protracted displacement, including many Roma IDP who had established settlements in vacant land that is prone to flooding or landslides (Turner, 2015).

The 2014 floods also showed how uniquely vulnerable disabled people are to natural hazards in BiH. Due to the lack of early warning systems and evacuation protocols accounting for their needs, persons with disabilities in the Doboje and Bijeljina areas were hit hard. As persons with disabilities tend to live on the first floor of buildings, many saw their lodging destroyed by the floods. They also could not be systematically reached by the civil defence agencies and had difficulty accessing aid points (UNDP, 2016).

To summarise, there is a complex set of factors linked to social circumstances, health, behaviours and genetics that influence how exposed and vulnerable people are to environmental issues. Moreover within the disadvantaged groups identified, people’s levels of involvement and needs regarding the environment

<sup>18</sup> The WHO reported 223.6 deaths per 100,000 due to air pollution in 2012 (WHO, 2016).

are different. For instance, Roma households (27%) are more likely to lack improved sanitation than non-Roma households (6%) (UNICEF, 2014), notably because they are more likely to live in informal settlements where basic services are not provided (OSCE’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2014). Among Roma households, there is a correlation between those with lower income and lower education levels and a lesser use of improved sanitation (Bernat, 2015).

## **Different group interests and their potential to influence how environmental issues are addressed**

Certain population subgroups may also have the potential to help address environmental issues. It is important not only to identify different needs and vulnerabilities related to environmental issues, but also to recognise, build on and strengthen the potential that disadvantaged groups may have to influence and inform environmental policies, programmes and behaviours.

For instance, like elsewhere in Europe (EIGE, 2017), women in BiH tend to be slightly more concerned about, and motivated to act to address, environmental issues than men (The European Values Study [EVS], 2020).<sup>19</sup> Research points to various factors that may explain this trend, including differences in socialisation, whereby women are taught to care about others and be socially responsible (Zelezny et al., 2000). Due to traditional gender roles, women also tend to have a major influence in the management and procurement of natural resources in households and communities (UNDP, 2013a). Elderly women in rural areas may, for instance, play a key role regarding the sustainable use of non-wood forest products in BiH, as they have traditionally been in charge of the collection, preparation and selection of fruits for drying (UNEP, 2016).

The EVS also shows that younger generations are less likely to prioritise the environment over the economy, regardless of sex or income level, and that higher education levels are correlated with a greater willingness to provide a portion of their income to address environmental issues and to prioritise the environment over the economy when questioned (EVS, 2020). This might be partly explained by the high level of youth unemployment in BiH – which was 36.6% in 2020 (32.5% for men and 42.8% for women),

<sup>19</sup> Women are slightly more likely to agree or agree strongly with the following two statements: “Protecting the environment should be given priority, even if it causes slower economic growth and some loss of jobs” and “I would give part of my income if I were certain that the money would be used to prevent environmental pollution” (The European Values Study [EVS], 2020).



Man and dogs after flooding event. Photo: U.S. Army National Guard, Flickr

compared with 15.9% for the whole labour force (14.1% for men and 18.5% for women) (ILOSTAT, 2020). The variation in environmental attitudes suggests that information campaigns and public engagement on environmental matters would most likely benefit from a more nuanced approach.

## **GESEP implications of environmental policy**

Environmental policy itself can affect population subgroups differently. For instance, air quality policies, such as imposing new vehicle standards or new energy taxes, may affect low-income households disproportionately (Mackie & Haščić, 2018; World Bank, 2019b). In Sarajevo, prolonged school closures have been implemented in response to safe limits of particulate matter being exceeded (UNICEF, 2017b). This has subsequently affected children's education. Another example relates to policies aimed at more effective waste management systems, which tend to privilege regional or multi-municipal landfills over municipal ones. In BiH, closing municipal dumpsites will impact Roma communities whose livelihoods may depend on picking waste (see Nikoloski and Marnie,

2018). Similarly, transitions away from coal mining and coal-based power generation – coal mining employs about 16,000 workers and the coal industry generates over 80% of BiH's power (IEA, 2018; Sejmenović et al., 2016) – are likely to affect workers, households and communities that depend on these activities (World Bank, 2018).

Conversely, some environmental measures may contribute to addressing GESEP issues. For instance, improving energy efficiency in social housing contributes to reducing energy poverty and increasing the well-being of marginalized households (UN in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2017; WHO, 2019). There is increasing attention being paid to the employment potential of the environmental rehabilitation, sustainable agriculture, renewable energy and energy efficiency sectors (Hamilton, 2017). For instance, various projects in the Western Balkans and Central Asia have sought to make the (formal) waste management sector more inclusive of informal waste pickers and women (EBRD, 2011; GIZ, 2018).



# Policy considerations

As described in the previous section, environmental and GESEP issues are interlinked in multiple ways. In particular, environmental issues tend to disproportionately affect socially disadvantaged population groups, making existing inequalities worse (Ganzleben & Kazmierczak, 2020). This increases the risk of not achieving the goals of the BiH ESAP 2030+ and will likely be to the detriment of future environmental policy and sustainable development. Therefore, it is essential to incorporate GESEP considerations into environmental policy and vice versa. This section provides some initial insights as to how to integrate GESEP considerations into environmental policymaking, so that it addresses environmental issues and social inequity synergistically. Table 1 summarises these insights.

## Collecting disaggregated data

The first step towards integrating GESEP into environmental policymaking relates to collecting data on environmental inequalities. In BiH, there is a lack of recent data on the state of the environment and environmental health in general. Moreover, the information about differentiated vulnerabilities, needs and agency in relation to environmental challenges is limited and fragmented across multiple information sources. This leads to a poor understanding of the impacts of environmental degradation on different population groups and their needs. It also limits the scope and effectiveness of strategies. Without data, issues remain invisible and thus unaddressed by policy. It is therefore important to establish appropriate metrics to assess and monitor the exposure of different groups to environmental hazards and pollution, their dependence on ecosystem services, the extent and distribution of energy poverty, and their access to and ownership of environmental goods. For instance, disaggregated data on the impacts of environmental (e.g., air, chemical and noise) pollution on human health could be incorporated into the jurisdiction of the public health institutes in the entities (see SOER, 2013 regarding air pollution).

## Mainstreaming environmental and GESEP issues across all major government plans

Another key step is to integrate better GESEP objectives, principles and measures into environmental strategic documents and vice-versa. Indeed, strategic and programmatic institutional policies in the environmental sector are rarely gender-responsive and do not include vulnerable groups in planning and implementing environmental policies. In order to address environmental inequalities, environmental policy should not only aim to improve conditions for the overall population, but also establish measures targeted at vulnerable groups. For example, in the field of climate change and environmental hazards, it is necessary to develop early warning systems and evacuation protocols that include the perspectives and needs of different groups in society, accounting for gender, (dis)ability, age, poverty and migratory status (UNDP, 2016).

It is also important to introduce the concept of environmental inequities into other policy fields (Ganzleben & Kazmierczak, 2020). Urban planning and housing policy, for instance, can help address issues of energy poverty, exposure to noise and air pollution and access to green spaces. Improving energy efficiency in buildings (especially in social housing) could deliver multiple benefits, such as reduced air pollution, lessened energy poverty and increased well-being (UN in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2017; WHO, 2019). Similarly, enhancing the housing conditions of poor households, including Roma households, could help reduce air pollution and its negative health impacts (Nikoloski & Marnie, 2018).

## Tools to mainstream GESEP considerations

An essential step to mainstreaming GESEP considerations into environmental policy is to include marginalized communities and members of disadvantaged groups in policymaking processes, starting with increasing their representation in major



decision-making roles. For instance, the Beijing Platform for Action, an international effort to advance women's rights, monitors by sector the percentage of women in high-level positions dealing with climate change in national ministries responsible for environment, transport and energy. Another measure in this respect is to strengthen environment participation processes (such as public consultations under strategic environmental assessments) so that they are more inclusive and effectively feed into the policymaking process.

In addition, there are several policy tools that can help mainstream GESEP into environmental policymaking in BiH. One approach is to make better use of the gender equality institutional mechanisms.<sup>20</sup> Environmental institutions can, for instance, request the opinion of the Gender Equality Agency and/or Gender Equality Centres in Entities on the harmonization of draft legislation and other regulations, strategies, action plans and programs within its jurisdiction (Action Plan for AP UNSCR 1325). Another important policy tool to mainstream GESEP issues into environmental policy is gender-responsive budgeting, which allows policymakers to identify the differentiated impacts of public revenue allocations and expenditures as they affect men and women (UN Women, 2014). A similar approach exists for assessing public spending with regards to the Roma population (Regional Cooperation Council, 2020). Environmental impact and strategic environmental assessments can also be used to identify and address GESEP issues in relation to the environment. The EU Guidelines on the implementation of the EIA Directive, for instance, recommend adopting a broad understanding of the potential impacts on the environment and health, that accounts for impacts on vulnerable groups (European Commission, 2017).

Other potential measures relate to institutional capacities, such as training public officials in health, food safety, statistics, the environment and other relevant institutions on environmental inequities, including social and physiological risk factors, as well as formal and informal rules and norms that shape exposure, vulnerability and agency. Strengthening collaboration between environmental public institutions with institutions and civil society organizations in the field

<sup>20</sup> Gender equality institutional mechanisms in BiH include at the legislative level, the Commission for Gender Equality of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH, the Commissions for Gender Equality of the House of Peoples and the House of Representatives of the Parliament of FBiH, the Equal Opportunities Committee of the National Assembly of RS, as well as the Committees for Gender Equality of Cantonal Assemblies in the FBiH and dedicated committees in municipal assemblies across BiH. Moreover, at executive level, institutional mechanisms include the Agency for Gender Equality of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Gender Centre of the FBiH and the Gender Centre of Republika Srpska (Agency for Gender Equality of BiH, n.d.).

of gender equality, poverty reduction, social inclusion and human rights can also help fill the knowledge and capacity gaps that exist regarding environmental inequities within policymaking circles.

Given the differentiated rates of exposure and vulnerability to environmental damage in BiH, it is also useful to incorporate GESEP considerations into information and awareness campaigns. Targeted campaigns could help reduce the exposure of the most vulnerable groups to chemicals and noise, by explaining the dangers and implications for health, while emphasizing the different levels of exposure due to gender, physiological and socio-cultural differences. However, information and awareness measures need to go beyond recognising these differences and their origin. They also need to challenge them for reasons of ethics and effectiveness (mentioned at the beginning of this report). For example, recycling campaigns should challenge the social norms which assert that caring for the environment is a feminine trait and, therefore, the responsibility primarily of women.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe highlighted (UNECE, 2018) in its latest environmental review of BiH that while there has been progress with the development of the environmental legal and institutional framework, significant implementation challenges remain. It is therefore important to improve policy monitoring, evaluation and enforcement. Here, more effective and stronger collaboration between public institutions and specialised organizations can support policy design and implementation.

There are several indicators that can help monitor progress with mainstreaming GESEP into environmental policy, including:

- Disaggregated data on natural resources in terms of access and ownership
- Disaggregated data on vulnerability and exposure to environmental issues
- The number and scope of environmental objectives and measures in GESEP-related strategies and vice-versa
- The percentage of environmental laws and strategic documents that have been developed with inputs from the Gender Equality Mechanism and other GESEP stakeholders
- The quantity of public resources allocated to environmental measures benefitting disadvantaged groups
- The existence and implementation of regulatory impact assessment procedures that identify impacts on disadvantaged groups.



Low-income residential area in Europe. Photo: Zigmunds Dizgalvis, GettyImages

## Tools to address the distributional impacts of environmental policy

In addition, it is essential to assess the distributional impacts of environmental policy and develop ancillary measures that result in a more equitable distribution of environmental policy expenses. This can be done through socio-economic assessments of new policies and effective and inclusive stakeholder consultations when developing new policies.

As for addressing distributional impacts, better public transportation and/or targeted subsidies can help mitigate the disproportionate effects of new taxes and standards on low-income households. Financial or other types of incentives can be provided to income-poor households to comply with new vehicle standards policies or to adopt clean, efficient stoves (World Bank, 2019b). Measures such as re-skilling and reinforcing social safety nets to support affected workers – while also actively supporting affected regions with finance

(including investment), technical assistance and policy engagement that promotes diversification of the economy – can contribute to just transitions away from coal (Atteridge et al., 2020; Atteridge & Strambo, 2020).

Finally, ensuring that marginalized and disadvantaged groups benefit from the environmental solutions can help mitigate their negative impacts. For instance, generating employment opportunities through improved waste management systems and public space maintenance for Roma people, who often depend on informal waste picking and recycling, can help mitigate the negative socio-economic consequences they may suffer from a change in waste management policy.

Table 1: Summary of policy approaches to integrate GESEP considerations into environmental policymaking

Field of Action	Examples of ways to integrate GESEP into environmental policy
<b>Data collection</b>	Establish appropriate metrics and collect data on the exposure of different groups to environmental hazards and pollution, their dependence on ecosystem services, the extent and distribution of energy poverty, and their access and ownership of environmental goods.
<b>GESEP in government plans and strategies</b>	<p>Integrate better GESEP objectives, principles and measures into environmental strategic documents and vice-versa.</p> <p>Introduce the concept of environmental inequities into other policy fields, such as health, urban planning and housing.</p>
<b>Tools for mainstreaming GESEP in policymaking</b>	<p>Engage marginalized communities and members of disadvantaged groups and include them in policymaking processes.</p> <p>Increase the representation of disadvantaged groups in major decision-making roles.</p> <p>Strengthen environmental participation processes.</p> <p>Make better use of the gender equality institutional mechanisms.</p> <p>Implement gender-responsive and Roma-responsive budgeting.</p> <p>Establish regulatory assessment procedures that identify impacts on disadvantaged groups.</p> <p>Train public officials in the health, food safety, statistics, environmental and other relevant institutions on environmental inequities, including social and physiological risk factors, as well as formal and informal rules and norms that shape exposure, vulnerability and agency.</p> <p>Strengthen collaboration between environmental public institutions and civil society organizations in the field of gender equality, poverty reduction, social inclusion and human rights.</p> <p>Integrate GESEP considerations into environmental information and awareness campaigns.</p>
<b>Tools for addressing the distributional impacts of environmental policy</b>	<p>Assess the distributional impacts of environmental policy through socio-economic assessments and effective and inclusive stakeholder consultations.</p> <p>Design ancillary policy measures to mitigate the negative impacts of environmental policy on disadvantaged groups.</p> <p>Ensure that marginalized and disadvantaged groups can benefit from the environmental solutions.</p>



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# Annexes

## Annex 1: Overview of GESEP related strategic documents in BiH

### BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

[Strategy in the Area of Migrations and Asylum and Action Plan for the period 2016-2020](#)

This strategy is “a document based on all relevant indicators and factors in the area of migration, and on real, reliable and objective assessments of migration flows and interests of BiH in this area. Amongst those factors, particular importance rests on those that pertain to geo-strategic position of BiH, observed migration trends, constitutional legal frameworks, obligations arising from international treaties, movement towards a joint migration policy of the EU and adopted policies of authorized bodies of Bosnia and Herzegovina” (p. 5).

The strategy’s principles are principle of legality, principle of security of the State and its citizens, principle of integration, and principle of international cooperation.

[Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for addressing the issues of Roma in BiH \(2005\) and Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina for addressing Roma issues in the fields of employment, housing and healthcare 2017 - 2020](#)

The strategy is applicable in the long term (has no time frame) and contains the basic principles for gradual improvement of the situation of the Roma in BiH, while the details of implementation are regulated by action plans.

The Strategy includes the following fields of action: “education; employment; housing; health care; social security; civil registration and identification documents; census; participation in and partnership with authorities; organization and networking of Roma NGOs and non-Roma NGOs that address Roma issues; information; improving cultural identity by maintaining and promoting tradition; customs, religion, learning of the Romany language, history, art and culture matters; and the establishment of Roma cultural institutions and associations” (p. 2).

[Gender Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina \(2018-2022\)](#)

The third GAP BiH for the period 2018-2022 includes “goals, programs and measures for achieving gender equality in all areas of social life and work in both public and private spheres” (p. 9). The GAP BiH 2018-2022 builds on “strategic goals, priorities and measures of GAP BiH 2013-2017, State and Entity development strategy, European Union Strategy for equality of men and women and other relevant strategic documents of the Council of Europe, the European Union and the United Nations” (p. 10). It includes guidelines for other institutions at all levels of jurisdiction in BiH to develop operational plans for gender equality.

It contains three strategic goals: “(i) development, implementation and monitoring of program measures for the advancement of gender equality within the governmental institutions, as per priority areas; (ii) establishing and strengthening the system, mechanisms and instruments to achieve gender equality; (iii) establishing and strengthening co-operation and partnership” (pp. 10-11).



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[Disability Policy in BiH \(2009\)](#)

The Policy is based on the following principles: human rights, strengthening of socio-cultural capacities and institutions, strengthening of local communities, inclusion of persons with disabilities, gender equality, social inclusion, cooperation between different sectors, a principle of mixed protection and the availability of information to all persons with disabilities.

The goal of the Policy of BiH, its entities (the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Republika Srpska) and Brcko District, is to enable all persons with disabilities to achieve their highest possible life potential, with respect and dignity, independence, productivity and equal participation in society in the most accessible environment possible.

## FEDERATION OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

[Strategy for advancement of rights and status of persons with disabilities 2016-2021](#)

The Strategy seeks to define “strategic priorities, objectives and activities in the field of disability in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina for the next strategic period, following up on the principles of cross-sectoral approach to disability, and thus improve the status of persons with disabilities and society in general.” (p. 8) Objectives in this Strategy are based on specific issues affecting the status of persons with disabilities. The criteria that determines the status of persons with disabilities are: “(i) equality and non-discrimination in laws, (ii) accessible environment, information and communications, (iii) inclusion in all social processes, (iv) prevention and early intervention, (v) accessibility of support services, (vi) employment and rehabilitation, (vii) protection against violence and exploitation, (viii) raising awareness among the public and overcoming prejudices and stereotypes, and (ix) improving capacities of disabled persons’ organizations” (p. 24). The Strategy emphasizes that “special attention should be given to vulnerable groups potentially facing discrimination on multiple ground such as: children with developmental disabilities, youth with disabilities, women and girls with disabilities, elderly persons with disabilities, and persons with severe disabilities who require considerable social support” (p. 24).

## REPUBLIKA SRPSKA

[Strategy for Improving the Social Position of Persons with Disabilities 2017-2026](#)

The Strategy defines goals in the areas of (i) legislation, public and political life, (ii) economic independence, employment and professional rehabilitation, (iii) social protection, security and support, (iv) social healthcare protection and insurance, (v) education, (vi) culture and religion, (vii) accessibility and information, (viii) family life, sport and recreation and (ix) organizations of persons with disabilities. Representatives of CSO participated in the development of this strategy proposing goals, measures and activities.

[Strategy for Advancement of the Position of Elderly Persons 2019-2028](#)

The Strategy addresses the following issues: poverty of the elderly, healthcare services, housing and living conditions, life in rural and economically disadvantaged areas, social protection, lifelong learning, active participation in the community, prevention of violence and abuse of elderly people, social attitudes towards elderly and intergenerational solidarity.

The Strategy determines the directions that would lead to greater satisfaction and active participation of the elderly in everyday life, better use of free time and healthy aging (healthy lifestyles – including nutrition and recreation). This document is based on the following principles: (i) combating discrimination and marginalization, (ii) improving accessibility and mobility in the context of equal opportunities (iii) participation of the elderly in all areas of social life, (iv) establishing partnerships at all levels, (v) respect of diversity and promotion of intergenerational solidarity and (vi) achieving gender equality.

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[Strategy for Improving the Social Protection of Children without Parental Care 2015-2020](#)

The Strategy is designed to improve the position of boys and girls in RS who did not grow up with their own biological families.

The Strategy applies to children up to 18 years who are at risk in terms of their physical, mental, intellectual and social development for the following reasons: because they do not live in a family environment, because the child does not have both parents or it is impossible to live with them, because the child is threatened with separation from the parents due to a dysfunctional family (suffered violence, behavioural disorders) or because it is a child with developmental disabilities.

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## Annex 2: International Conventions related to GESEP ratified by BiH

In addition to national legislation and strategic documents on social protection and the protection of rights of various social groups, BiH has ratified major European and international treaties and conventions.

### BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

[The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities](#)

This Convention is a multilateral treaty of the Council of Europe. It seeks to protect the rights of minorities. Gaps in implementation remain with regards to, among others, ensuring “adequate access of Roma to housing, employment, health services and education” (Committee of Ministers, 2019, p. 1).

**Progress report from 2016:**

This document summarises progress related to legislative activities, improvement of the institutional framework, planning and strategic activities. It highlights the progress in implementing the Revised Roma Action Plan of Bosnia and Herzegovina which addresses the problems of Roma in the areas of employment, housing and health. The following developments are seen as strategic successes: (i) the number of Roma children enrolled in primary and secondary school has increased; (ii) a total of 740 housing units have been built or reconstructed so far; and (iii) significant progress with regards to registration in birth records has been made (Council of Ministers, 2016).

[The Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms](#)

The purpose of this Convention is to secure the universal and effective recognition and observance of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The maintenance and further realization of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms is considered a way to attain the Council of Europe’s goal of achieving greater unity between its members.

**Progress report:**

No progress report has been identified.

[Convention on the Rights of the Child](#)

This Convention sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health care and cultural rights of children. Among others, it obliges BiH to ensure the child's right to attain the highest standard of health through the following measures: controlling diseases and malnutrition by providing adequate nutrition and purified drinking water; assessing the dangers and risks of environmental pollution; providing information and education about children's health and nutrition, the benefits of breastfeeding, personal hygiene and environmental cleanliness; and accident prevention to all sections of the community, but especially parents and children.

**Progress report from 2017:**

“Since the submission of the last periodical report, BiH has made some progress in the protection of children's rights, primarily in terms of harmonizing the legislative framework with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (...), the adoption of strategic documents and action plans (incl. the Action Plan for Children of BiH 2015-2018) in order to better protect children, and the establishment of coordination state-level bodies for implementation of the Convention” (Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2018, p. 1).

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[The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence](#)

The Convention applies to all forms of violence against women, including domestic violence, which affects women disproportionately in relation to men. Objectives of this Convention include “to protect women from all forms of violence and to prevent, prosecute and eliminate violence against women and domestic violence; contribute to combating all forms of discrimination against women and promoting essential equality between women and men, including the empowerment of women; and develop a comprehensive framework, policies and measures to protect and assist all victims of violence against women and domestic violence” (p. 2).

**Progress report from 2016:**

This document presents progress in achieving most of the planned goals and measures. There was an increase in the number of legal acts delivered to the Agency for Gender Equality BiH requesting a formal opinion on compliance with the Law on Gender Equality. The report also mentions significant prevention and awareness raising by school youth and the non-governmental sector in conducting public campaigns to draw attention to the problem of violence against women and the need to report it. However, the institutional fragmentation in BiH continues to drive different practices, resulting in inequality in the practice of the right to protection and in the availability of help and support (Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2015).

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[Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#)

The Beijing Declaration “recognizes women’s human rights and sets out a comprehensive roadmap for achieving equality between women and men, with concrete measures and measurable outcomes across a range of issues affecting women and girls. These outcomes are divided into 12 inter-related areas where a need for urgent action was identified: poverty, education and training, health care, violence against women and girls, armed conflict, economic empowerment, power and decision-making, mechanisms to promote the advancement of women, women’s human rights, the media, the environment and the rights of girls” (Sabbati et al., 2020, p. 1).

**Progress report from 2019:**

The document reports progress in the legislative and strategic framework through gender mainstreaming (submitted and processed legal documents on consistency with Gender Equality Law have tripled compared to the previous reporting period). There is greater harmonization of regulations in the field of labour, health and social protection, and protection of victims of gender-based violence, including domestic violence. It also reports progress regarding harmonization of the European Union environmental acquis, particularly with regards to access, employment, vocational training and promotion, working conditions, the acquisition and procurement of goods and services, equal pay, occupational social security and the burden of proof. Other reported improvements include increased women’s access to and control over land, water, energy and other natural resources (Agency for Gender Equality of BiH, 2019).

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[The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\)](#)

The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) defines discrimination against women and sets the basis for achieving gender equality through ensuring women’s equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life, education, health and employment and how it can be achieved. In doing so, the Convention establishes not only an international bill of rights for women, but also an action plan for countries to guarantee those rights.

**Progress report from 2019:**

The report mentions progress in terms of legislative reforms and improvements to the policy framework to accelerate the elimination of discrimination against women and the promotion of gender equality in BiH. The report recommends raising public awareness, and that women are involved as much as possible in policy development. It also recommends strengthening “the application of temporary special measures targeting women belonging to disadvantaged groups, such as Roma women, asylum-seeking and refugee women, returnee women, single mothers, older women and women with disabilities, including those in political and public life as well as in the areas of education, employment and health” (Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, 2019, p. 6).

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[Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#)

This Convention seeks to guarantee the human rights and fundamental freedoms of persons with disabilities. It establishes the basis for creating legislation and policies that promote, protect and ensure the human rights and dignity of persons with disabilities and to ensure they are treated equally under the law.

**Progress report from 2017:**

The document reports on the adoption of a disability policy in BiH and the new Strategy for improving the rights and position of persons with disabilities in FBiH for 2016-2021. It recommends that BiH adopts formal and transparent mechanisms for regular consultation with organizations representing persons with disabilities – including women and children with disabilities, deaf and hard of hearing persons, persons with psychosocial and/or intellectual disabilities – in all entities and cantons. It also recommends that BiH adopts an effective system in accordance with the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 in order to have an accessible and comprehensive emergency strategy and protocols for situations of risk. Measures to achieve this would include hotlines, a text message-warning application, general manuals in sign language and in Braille.

With regards to statistics and data collection, the Committee recommends that BiH should develop systematic data collection and reporting procedures. The collected data should be analysed and disaggregated based on the characteristics of its population with disabilities, including sex, age, ethnicity, type of impairment, socio-economic status, employment and place of residence, as well as on the barriers that persons with disabilities face in society.

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[International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(ICESCR\)](#)

This multilateral treaty seeks to guarantee economic, social and cultural rights to all persons within their territory, regardless of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

**Progress report from 2019:**

The report presents progress regarding the harmonisation of laws and policies with the ICESCR; the adoption of action plans related to gender equality, employment, housing, health care, social protection and education of Roma; and measures to reduce undeclared work. It reports the progress made in labour law, including equal salary for equal work and the harmonization of regulations related to maternity and maternity leave. The report also mentions additional harmonization of legislation in the field of human trafficking, a new water management strategy to protect drinking water, and financial incentives for women's entrepreneurship in the field of rural development (Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of BiH, n.d.).

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[UNSCR Resolution 2242](#)

This resolution integrates women into the Peace and Security Agenda, including contemporary challenges such as rising violent extremism, climate change and unprecedented numbers of displaced people. The resolution highlights the relationships between women's participation and sustainable peace and security.

**Progress report:**

No progress report has been identified.

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[Maternity Protection Convention \(No. 183\)](#)

This Convention promotes "equality of all women in the workforce and the health and safety of the mother and child, and the development of the protection of maternity in national law and practice" (p. 1).

**Progress report from 2015:**

The report notes that benefits for the unemployed and employed persons, who use the rights in the field of maternal and maternity protection, are not paid regularly in certain cantons (in FBiH), while some fees are not paid at all. This has a particularly negative impact on people for whom this benefit is important, or even the sole source of income following the birth of a child, as well as employers for whom delays in refunding payments can cause additional financial hardship. The report suggests that the optimal solution would be to create a special fund for the payment of benefits, which would be financed from contributions. The report proposes the Government of FBiH and the cantonal governments examine how to apply (in FBiH) a model like the RS Child Protection Fund, which ensures regular payment of such fees (Human Rights Ombudsman of BiH, 2015).

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## [Resolution OUN 46/91](#)

The Resolution contains the principles of the United Nations for the elderly, and its purpose is to improve their lives. These principles have encouraged the governments of all countries to include them in their national programs whenever possible.

### **Progress report from 2017:**

The report states that the key problems faced by the elderly population are low monthly incomes; high morbidities of cardiovascular and malignant diseases and related mortality; high frequency of sensory and physical disabilities and neurological and mental disorders such as Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease, polyneuritis, acute psychosis, dementia and depression. The strategic goals are: (i) reduction of the poverty rate of the elderly, (ii) improving the health of the elderly, (iii) improving access to public institutions and transportation for all elderly people, (iv) improving the provision of social services, (v) raising awareness of older people about social services and rights, (vi) increasing the awareness of relatives about the need to care for elderly family members, (vii) reducing violence against the elderly, (viii) improving the active participation of older people in social, cultural and sports activities in local communities, and (ix) improving the systemic inclusion of older people in lifelong learning programs (BiH, 2017).

It is also necessary to develop a strategic framework document for the well-being of the elderly persons at the level of BiH, which is a necessary prerequisite to apply for currently available European Union funds (BiH, 2017).

## **Annex 3: Overview of GESEP-related laws in BiH**

### **BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

<b>Law on the Protection of Rights of National Minorities (Official Gazette of BiH, No. 12/03, 76/05 and 93/08, n.d.)</b>	This Law determines the rights and obligations of members of national minorities in BiH and the obligations of the BiH authorities to respect and protect, preserve and develop the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identities of BiH citizens who are part of a minority. The law protects the status, equality and rights of 17 national minorities (Albanians, Jews, Roma, Italians, Turks, etc.).
<b>Law on Gender Equality (Official Gazette of BiH, 16/03 and 102/09, n.d.)</b>	This Law regulates, promotes and protects gender equality; guarantees equal opportunities and equal treatment of all persons regardless of gender in public and private spheres of society; and regulates protection from discrimination on grounds of gender.
<b>Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination (Official Gazette of BiH, 59/09 and 66/16, n.d.)</b>	The Law establishes the "framework for implementation of equal rights and opportunities for all persons in BiH" (p. 3). It regulates the system that protects against discrimination, defines responsibilities and obligations of legislative, judicial and executive authorities in BiH, as well as legal persons and individuals with public authority, to ensure the protection, promotion and creation of conditions for equal treatment.

### **FEDERATION OF BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

<b>Law on the Protection of Rights of National Minorities (Official Gazette of FBiH, No. 56/08, n.d.)</b>	This Law, in accordance with the Law on the Protection of Rights of National Minorities of BiH and the EU Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, determines the rights and obligations of persons belonging to national minorities in FBiH. It also sets out the obligations of the authorities to respect, protect, preserve and develop the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of every member of a national minority in FBiH. FBiH protects the status and rights of 17 national minorities (including the Roma, Jews, and Albanians, among others).
<b>Law on Displaced Persons and Refugees (Official Gazette of FBiH, No. 15/05, n.d.)</b>	This Law regulates the fundamental rights and obligations of displaced persons and refugees, the acquisition and termination of their status, their return to the place of residence from which they were displaced, the monitoring of the records of these persons, and the provision of resources for return and exercising other rights.

<b>Law on Youth (Official Gazette of FBiH, No. 36/10, n.d.)</b>	This Law regulates issues of interest for the lives, positions and activities of young people in FBiH. It defines the creation and implementation of youth policies at all levels of government in FBiH through a multifaceted approach. This approach consists of considering the needs, requirements and interests of young people; strengthening the participation and involvement of young people in informing them at all levels of decision-making in FBiH through regulated participation mechanisms and the implementation of the principles of non-discrimination, solidarity and ethics in all activities related to youth issues.
<b>Law on Social Protection, Protection of Civilian Victims of War and Family with Children (Official Gazette of FBiH, No. 36/99, 54/04, 39/06, 14/09, 7/14, 45/16, 19/17 and 40/18, n.d.)</b>	This Law regulates the principles of social protection of citizens and their families, establishes social protection rights and beneficiaries of the social welfare system, and describes the operation of institutions in charge of protecting and supporting persons with disabilities. It also regulates the fundamental rights of persons with disabilities, the special rights of civil war victims and members of their families, the protection of civilian victims of war and the protection of families with children in FBiH.
<b>REPUBLIKA SRPSKA</b>	
<b>Law on Social Protection (Official Gazette of RS, No. 37/12, 90/16 and 94/19, n.d.)</b>	This Law regulates the system of social protection, the users and their rights of social protection; the procedure and conditions for exercising the right of social protection, independent work in the field of social protection, financing, supervision and other issues important for the functioning and realization of social protection of citizens.
<b>Law on the Protection of Rights of National Minorities (Official Gazette of RS, No. 2/05, n.d.)</b>	This Law stipulates the rights and obligations of members of national minorities in RS and obligations of the authorities in RS to respect, protect, preserve and develop the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of every member of a national minority in RS who is a citizen of BiH and RS.
<b>Law on Displaced Persons, Returnees and Refugees (Official Gazette of RS, No. 42/05 and 52/12, n.d.)</b>	This Law regulates the rights of displaced persons, refugees and returnees in RS, refugees from BiH, determination and termination of the status of displaced persons and returnees, resocialization and return of these persons and other issues of importance for the protection of these persons in RS.
<b>BRCKO DISTRICT</b>	
<b>Law on Social Protection (Official Gazette of BD, No. 1/03, 4/04, 19/07, 2/08, 21/18 and 32/19, n.d.)</b>	This Law regulates the principles of protection of the elderly, infirm and other persons in a state of social need; the right to social protection; as well as the organization and functioning of social protection institutions.
<b>Law on Youth (Official Gazette of BD, No. 18/17, n.d.)</b>	This Law prescribes the rights and obligations of young people, youth organizations, youth care, institutional participation of young people in decision-making and other issues of interest to the life, position and activities of young people in Brcko District.
<b>Law on Child Protection (Official Gazette of BD, No. 18/20, n.d.)</b>	This Law prescribes that child protection should be provided to every child with approximately equal conditions for healthy and proper physical, intellectual and emotional development in the family. The rights in the field of child protection include salary compensation during maternity leave, maternity allowance, child benefits, and psychological treatment for married people who want children. The Law defines child protection rights and the procedures for exercising these rights.





